What Is Claimed Is:

     1.   A method of classifying an area rug, the method comprising:

     identifying a set of attributes that characterize area rugs, the attributes including a plurality of the following: size, color, layout, pattern, style, make, pile, weave, foundation, knot, category, age, and condition;

     determining possible values for each of the identified attributes;

     obtaining an image of the area rug;

     inspecting the image;

     determining values for the set of attributes based on the inspection; and

     associating with the area rug a set of values for each one of the set of identified attributes.

     2.   The method of claim 1 further comprising storing the image and associated attributes in a database containing a plurality of images and associated attributes.

     3.   The method of claim 2 wherein the stored images are high-resolution images.

     4.   The method of claim 3 wherein the images have a resolution high enough to enable a user to zoom in and view the details of a user selected portion of the rug.

     5.   The method of claim 4 wherein the images have a resolution of greater than about 1000x1500 pixels.

6.   The method of claim 1 wherein the steps of inspecting and determining are done manually.

7.   The method of claim 2 wherein the steps of inspecting and determining comprise:
searching the database to find a first set of images similar to the image of the rug being classified;
determining a correlation among the attributes associated with the images in the first set images; and
assigning attributes to the image being classified responsive to the determined correlation.

8.   The method of claim 2 further comprising assigning a code for each possible value of each attributes.

9.   The method of claim 8 further comprising concatenating the codes for the value of each attribute associated with the area rug being classified to create a product code.

10.   The method of claim 9 wherein a serial number is combined with the product code to form a unique identifier.

11.   The method of claim 10 wherein the product identifier is affixed to the area rug being classified.

12.   The method of claim 1 wherein the area rug is a handmade rug and the attributes associated with each handmade rug include size, color, layout,

pattern, style, make, pile, weave, foundation, knot, category, age, and condition.

13. Apparatus for classifying an area rug, the apparatus comprising:

a computer programmed with a database associating an image of a area rug with a predetermined set of attributes that characterize area rugs, wherein each attribute has a value selected from a predetermined list of values, the computer further programmed to:

determine values for each attribute in the predetermined set of attributes; and

associate with the area rug a set of values for each attribute in the predetermined set of attributes.

14. The apparatus of claim 13 wherein the step of determining values for the set of attributes comprises steps of:

displaying the image of the area rug being classified to a user; and

accepting from the user an indication of the values for each attribute in the predetermined set of attributes.

15. The apparatus of claim 13 wherein the step of determining values for the set of attributes comprises steps of:

searching the database for images similar to the image of the area rug being classified;

determining a correlation among values of the attributes associated with each image in the database; and

assigning a value for at least one attribute in the predetermined set of attributes responsive to the determined correlation.

14 16. The apparatus of claim 13 wherein the stored images are high-resolution images.

15 17. The apparatus of claim 17 wherein the images have a resolution high enough to enable a user to zoom in and view the details of a user selected portion of the rug.

16 18. The apparatus of claim 17 wherein the images have a resolution of greater than about 1000x1500 pixels.

17 19. The apparatus of claim 13 wherein each possible value of each one of the predetermined set of attributes has an associated code, and wherein the computer is further programmed to concatenate the codes corresponding to the attributes associated with the area rug being categorized to form a product code.

18 20. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the computer is further programmed to combine a serial number with the product code to form a unique identifier.

19 21. The apparatus of claim 20 further comprising an output device wherein the computer is programmed to output either the product code or product identifier so that it may be affixed to the rug being classified.

20. 22. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the predetermined set of attributes includes at least one of: size, color, layout, pattern, style, make, pile, weave, foundation, knot, category, age, and condition.

21. 23. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the predetermined set of attributes includes size, color, layout, pattern, style, make, pile, weave, foundation, knot, category, age, and condition.